

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY RABAT
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SUBJECT: SPAIN AND NATO: THE PORTUGUESE CONNECTION

REF: (A) USNATO 00417 (DTG 141239Z JAN 78), (B) IR 6 879 0017 78
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SUMMARY: SPANISH-PORTUGUESE MILITARY LINKS REPRESENT A
POTENTIAL ASSET IN OUR EFFORTS TO BRING SPAIN INTO NATO. BUT
PORTUGUESE DISSATISFACTION WITH THE PACE OF THE FORCE
MODERNIZATION PROGRAM IS FEEDING A NATO-DOESN'T-CARE SYNDROME
WHICH COULD AFFECT SPANISH ATTITUDES. END SUMMARY.

1. NARROWING THE ISSUE: WE THINK USNATO IS RIGHT ON THE MARK IN POINTING TO THE NEED TO CONVINCE THE SPANIARDS OF WHAT THEY ARE MISSING BY NOT BECOMING MEMBERS OF THE ALLIANCE. THIS IS THE NUB OF THE PROBLEM, BUT BRIEFING MATERIALS WILL GO ONLY SO FAR. SPANISH ATTITUDES FORMED BY THEIR ASSOCIATION WITH THE MILITARY ESTABLISHMENTS OF INDIVIDUAL ALLIANCE MEMBERS ARE, WE BELIEVE, FAR MORE IMPORTANT.

2. IBERIAN MILITARY COOPERATION: THE PORTUGUESE HAVE MADE A CONSCIOUS EFFORT TO EXPAND MILITARY-TO-MILITARY RELATIONS, INCLUDING:

--THE IBERIAN PENINSULA ARMED FORCES CONFERENCE WHICH TOOK PLACE IN MADRID IN MARCH 1977 (IR 6 879 0136 77);

--THE "VERY POSITIVE" HIGH-LEVEL PORTUGUESE-SPANISH MILITARY CONTACTS UNDERTAKEN AS PART OF PRESIDENT EANES'S MAY 1977 VISIT TO SPAIN (77 MADRID 4176).

--PARTICIPATION BY PORTUGUESE PARATROOPERS IN A JOINT EXERCISE WITH THE SPANISH AIR FORCE IN OCTOBER 1977 (IR 6 879 0323 77).

3. AN ASSET OR A LIABILITY? EXPANDING PORTUGUESE-SPANISH MILITARY RELATIONS REPRESENTS A POTENTIAL ASSET IN OUR EFFORTS TO BRING SPAIN INTO NATO. BUT THERE IS ALSO A NEGATIVE SIDE.

SOME PORTUGUESE FEAR THAT BRINGING THE SPANISH IN MIGHT
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REDUCE PORTUGAL'S IMPORTANCE WITHIN THE ALLIANCE. IN ADDITION, PORTUGUESE DISSATISFACTION WITH THE PACE OF THE FORCE MODERNIZATION PROGRAM HAS ALREADY PRODUCED MORE THAN A FEW SOUR NOTES HERE. THERE IS A DISTURBING NATO-DOESN'T-CARE SYNDROME, ESPECIALLY AT HIGH LEVELS WITHIN THE PORTUGUESE AIR FORCE. WE WOULD BE SURPRISED IF SOME OF THESE SENTIMENTS HAVE NOT ALREADY BEGUN TO MOVE ACROSS THE BORDER.

4. THE NET ASSESSMENT: DESPITE RECENT COMMENTS BY PORTUGUESE AIR FORCE CHIEF LEMOS FERREIRA (REF B), CRITICISM OF NATO IS FAR FROM BEING THE NORM WITHIN THE PORTUGUESE ARMED FORCES. THE OVERALL VIEW OF THE EUROPEAN/NATO CONNECTION IS STILL HIGHLY POSITIVE. THE PORTUGUESE SOCIALISTS ARE ALSO PREPARED TO PLAY A HELPFUL BEHIND-THE-SCENES ROLE IN DEALINGS WITH THE PSOE. THUS THE NET ASSESSMENT IS FAVORABLE. BUT ADDRESSEES SHOULD ALSO BE AWARE OF SOME NEGATIVE ASPECTS AND SEEK TO COUNTER THEM IN BRIEFINGS, SEMINARS AND THE LIKE.
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